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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR WATERS/ABRAMS/SINGH

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TAGS: KWBG PGOV PREL PTER PHUM KPAL IS

SUBJECT: SETTLERS OUT OF HEBRON WHOLESALE MARKET...FOR NOW

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On August 7, some 3000 Israeli security personnel removed settlers from three crowded structures in Hebron's wholesale market area. Four settlers were arrested.

Hundreds of settler youth protested the action and tried to stop the Israeli security forces, but did not resort to extreme violence. END SUMMARY.

Settlers Removed

¶2. (C) According to local press, on August 7, Israeli security forces removed some 150 Israelis from three crowded structures in Hebron's wholesale market area (located next to the Avraham Avinu settlement enclave within the H2 area of Hebron). The 150 Israelis were a mix of squatters who had taken up residence and protesters seeking to protect their presence. Press reports estimate 1000 police and 2000 IDF troops were used in the operation, which resulted in 40 injuries and four arrests. Settlers barricaded themselves inside and sang songs, while settler youth climbed above the structure and dropped cooking oil, eggs, water, flour, rocks, and light bulbs onto security forces. UN OCHA official Tareq Talahma told Poloff that the whole episode was "a real mess", but it was "not terribly violent" and that the IDF prevented many more demonstrators from accessing Hebron from surrounding areas.

¶3. (C) According to the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), an estimated 300 young protesters from the neighboring settlement of Kiryat Arba and the four settlement enclaves in Hebron first took to the streets on August 5 to protest the planned evacuation and harass neighboring Palestinian residents. Hagit Ofra of Peace Now told PolOff that settler youth broke into four shops and a mosque during the August 5-7 period. She said settler youth entered the Cordoba Girls School across from the Beit Hadassah settlement enclave and partially set it on fire. Imad Hamdan of the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC) told PolOff that the HRC's old headquarters in the closed military zone (at present inaccessible to HRC) was burned down on August 5.

Eyebrows Barely Raised

¶4. (C) TIPH Head of Mission Karl Henrik Sjursen barely raised an eyebrow over the "internal Israeli affair" and told PolOff he fully expects another round between settlers and security forces. UN OCHA and Peace Now representatives also dismissed the significance of the marketplace evacuation. They pointed to two other recent, well known "invasions" in Hebron of Palestinian shops that are now being used as a synagogue and a youth hostel. Hagit Ofra said attention focused on the settler occupation of the wholesale market only because it was the result of a recent Israeli Supreme

Court decision. She explained that the Israeli Supreme Court decided to evict the settlers in 2006, the Israeli Attorney General nullified a subsequent deal with the IDF for voluntary evacuation of the property, and the Supreme Court last week issued an order to evacuate the property, resulting in the August 7 forced eviction.

15. (C) David Wilder, spokesman for the Hebron settlers offered little comment to PolOff and sounded exhausted and overworked the morning after the evacuation. He said only that "we had a couple thousand guests in uniform yesterday." Comment: In speaking to the press, however, he and other representatives of the settler community sent the message to the GOI that "we will not go quietly," End Comment.

WALLES